DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 266 077 SO 016 931

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TITLE The New Women's Educational Equity Act: Still Alive and Making a Difference. PEER Policy Paper #3.
INSTITUTION National Organization for Women, Washington, D.C. Project on Equal Education Rights.
PUB DATE 85
NOTE 4p.; Produced by the NOW Legal Defense and Education Fund. For related Policy Paper, see SO016930-933.
AVAILABLE FROM PEER, 1413 K St., N.W., 9th Floor, Washington, DC 20005 ($1.00).
PUB TYPE Information Analyses (070)

EDRS PRICE MF01 Plus Postage. PC Not Available from EDRS.
DESCRIPTORS Citizen Participation; *Educational Legislation; Elementary Secondary Education; *Equal Education; Females; *Feminism; Government (Administrative Body); Postsecondary Education; *Sex Discrimination; *Womens Education
IDENTIFIERS *Womens Educational Equity Act

ABSTRACT

Revisions made in the 1981 Women's Educational Equity Act when it was extended in 1984 are outlined in this report. An introduction provides background on the 1981 and 1984 acts and briefly recounts the Reagan administration's opposition to the law. Various aspects of the 1984 law are outlined in separate sections. A description of authority and funding is followed by a section-by-section analysis of changes in the bill: purpose; grant and contract authority; local assistance programs; challenge grants; national advisory Council on Women's Education programs; and reports, evaluation, and dissemination. A final section describes what citizens can do to insure continuation of the law. (LP)

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THE NEW WOMEN'S EDUCATIONAL EQUITY ACT:
STILL ALIVE AND MAKING A DIFFERENCE

Peer Policy Paper #3
National Organization for Women
Washington, D.C.

1985

SP 016 931

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peer *Policy Paper #3*

Spring 1985

The New Women's Educational Equity Act:* Still Alive and Making a Difference

The Women's Educational Equity Act of 1984, Title IV of the Education Amendments of 1984 (P.L. 98-511), became law in October of 1984. The passage of this law, which revises and extends the Women's Educational Equity Act (WEEA), marked the high point of four years of bitter controversy over the continued existence of the WEEA Program. Since 1981, the Program's budget has been decreased by over 40 percent, the Program Office has been downgraded to the lowest bureaucratic level in the Department of Education, its staff has been reduced in both size and status, the position of "Director" has been abolished, and the former Director has been fired. Indeed, in every fiscal year since 1981, the President has asked Congress to withhold funding for the WEEA Program; but Congress has continued to appropriate funds in each year.[1]

Placed in this context, the continuation of WEEA for another five years represents a significant victory in the effort to save the only federal education program specifically designed to promote true educational equity for women and girls of all racial and ethnic groups, including disabled women and girls. Further, the revisions to the Act make important improvements in its purpose and programs. The following analysis briefly describes these changes in the new Women's Educational Equity Act.

The New WEEA

Authorization and Funding

The Women's Educational Equity Act of 1984 extends the Program until 1989. The authorization level (or funding ceiling), which had been set at $6 million in 1981, will increase gradually from $10 million in 1985, to $12 million in 1986, $14 million in 1987, $16 million in 1988 and $20 million in 1989.

Although the program's authorization level will increase, there is no guarantee that Congress will increase funding. For example, although Congress could have appropriated $10 million in 1985, they chose to appropriate only $6 million—the program's funding level since 1982.

Section by Section Analysis

Section 931(a)—Purpose. The original purpose of WEEA was to "provide educational equity for women in the United States and to provide financial assistance to enable educational agencies and institutions to meet the requirements of Title IX." The new WEEA adds a new purpose that makes explicit the Program's commitment to educational equity for all women.

This new purpose is: *"to provide educational equity for women and girls who suffer multiple discrimination, bias or stereotyping based on sex and on race, ethnic origin, disability or age."* Since 1980, the Program's implementing regulations have included priorities for funding projects that address the particular educational equity needs of women of color and disabled women. But this marks the first time that the law itself has included this purpose.

In addition, in the "Findings" section (Section 931(b)(1)), the Congress has added a new statement that addresses the current education reform movement; it states that: "The Congress finds and declares that excellence in education cannot be achieved without equity for women and girls." Although this statement does not impose new requirements, it is the strongest statement of federal policy regarding excellence and equity in education that has been made during the past four years.

Section 932(a)—Grant and Contract Authority. The new Act requires that at least one grant or contract be awarded for each of the six authorized activities listed in the Act. These include demonstration, developmental, and dissemination activities in six general categories:

- curricula, textbooks, and other educational materials;
- preservice and inservice training;
- research and development;
- guidance and counseling;
- programs for adult women;
- vocational education, career education, physical education, and educational administration.

This requirement was inserted to ensure that the Department of Education would support a variety of demonstration, developmental, and dissemination programs—with particular emphasis on continued dissemination of equity materials and programs.

"Tier 2"—Local Assistance Program. When WEEA was reauthorized for the first time in 1978, the Congress added a new purpose and program—to provide specific grants to local educational agencies, other educational institutions, and private non-profit organizations that would assist in implementing Title IX at the local level. Under the law at that time, funds could be used to support these local projects *only* if the total appropriation for WEEA exceeded $15 million. Any funds appropriated under that amount could be used only to support model "programs of national, statewide, or general significance."

The new WEEA amends this funding provision and allows appropriated funds to be used to support local implementation projects—at the discretion of the Secretary of Education—*if* appropriations reach $6 million.

Section 934—Challenge Grants. The new WEEA revamps the small grants program established under previous law. The maximum grant amount is raised from $25,000 to $40,000

[1]For a more detailed account of the recent history of the WEEA Program, see *A Clash of Ideologies: The Reagan Administration Versus the Women's Educational Equity Act*, (published by PEER and available for $2.00/copy) and "Equity in Exile: The Reagan War on Equality" by Judith Paterson, *Ms. Magazine*, November, 1984, pages 18-20.

*P.L. 98-511, the Women's Educational Equity Act of 1984.

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Published by the Project on Equal Education Rights, NOW Legal Defense and Education Fund.

and the purpose of the program is clarified; challenge grants may include funding for:

- Comprehensive plans for implementation of equity programs at every grade level;
- Innovative approaches to school-community partnerships for equity;
- New dissemination and replication strategies for equity materials; and,
- Other innovative approaches to achieving the purposes of the Act.

Section 936. The National Advisory Council on Women's Educational Programs. The new WEEA establishes criteria for the selection of the members of the National Advisory Council to ensure that all members have some demonstrated expertise in issues of women's educational equity and that the Council's membership is representative of minority, disabled and older women.

This is a significant change from previous law, which simply required that members of the Council be "individuals, broadly representative of the general public who, by virtue of their knowledge or experience, are versed in the role and status of women in American society." This general language proved insufficient to ensure that individuals with a commitment to educational equity and expertise in its implementation were appointed to the Council.

The new language reflects Congressional intent that the Council members should include *"experts in a wide range of issues of educational equity for women at all levels of education," "individuals who are representative of and expert in the educational needs of racial and ethnic minority women, older women, and disabled women," and "both women and men who have demonstrated commitment to and expertise in the purposes" of the Act.*

Section 937. Reports, Evaluation, and Dissemination. Under previous law, the WEEA Program Office was required to submit an *Annual Report* to Congress every second year (in 1980, 1982, and 1984). Under the new WEEA, the Department must produce an *Annual Report* every year. Further, the Department is *required*, for the first time, to evaluate and disseminate—at low cost—all materials and programs developed under the Act.

Again, this is a significant revision, reflecting Congress' intention that the products of WEEA grants should be made available to educators and activists throughout the country who can replicate and use them in a variety of settings.

What You Can Do

Technical amendments to the WEEA regulations, designed simply to implement the specific changes in the new law, were published in the *Federal Register* on March 22, 1985 and take effect as final regulations 45 days later. Because these new rules simply restate the new provisions of the law, no public comments are required.

Although the Act has been reauthorized and extended, *threats to its continuation* remain, including:

Defunding: The President's 1986 budget request continues the Administration's earlier policy and requests *"zero funding"* for the WEEA Program. In its recent deliberations, the Senate Budget Committee also assumed that there would be no funding for WEEA when they developed budget recommendations. However, compromises appear to be in the making and WEEA may be included among the programs that have their funding restored.

Deregulation: The Department of Education plans to rewrite the WEEA regulations during the coming year. The law requires that new regulations be promulgated to implement the "Tier 2" program of grants for local equity projects. At the same time, the Department probably will propose new funding priorities and evaluation criteria to replace those in the current regulations. This "deregulation" process includes the opportunity for public comment on the proposed regulations.

As an advocate for WEEA and educational equity for women and girls, you can be involved in this process and can take the following actions to ensure that your views are heard by the Congress, the Administration, and your State and local educational policymakers.

- Ask your Congressional representatives—both your Senators and Congressperson—to support funding for WEEA.
- Submit comments on the proposed WEEA regulations when they are published in the *Federal Register*.[2]
- Spread the word about the importance of the WEEA Program by publicizing the Program's accomplishments in your local community, through letters and articles in the newspapers and appearances on radio and television stations.[3]

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[2]Contact the WEEA Program staff to request a copy of the proposed regulations as soon as they are published (WEEAP, U.S. Department of Education, Room 2017, FOB-6, 400 Maryland Avenue, S.W., Washington, D.C. 20202; 202-245-2465).

[3]For information and technical assistance on implementing a community campaign for equity, contact PEER and ask for *Organizing for Change: PEER's Guide to Campaigning for Equal Education*, available for $12.95/copy.

PEER, the Project on Equal Education Rights of the NOW Legal Defense and Education Fund, is one of the leading national advocacy programs for educational equity for women and girls of all racial and ethnic groups, both disabled and non-disabled. PEER's National Affiliate Network links activists and educators in a national community of concern for the advancement of women and girls.

Created in 1974, PEER has received support from various sources, including the Carnegie Corporation, the Ford Foundation, the Rockefeller Family Fund, and several corporations.

This analysis was prepared by Theresa Cusick, PEER Program Associate for Legislation, and Leslie R. Wolfe, Director.

To order more copies of *The Women's Educational Equity Act of 1984* write PEER, 1413 K Street, N.W., 9th Floor, Washington, D.C. 20005 or call (202) 332-7337. $1.00 per copy payable to PEER by check or money order.

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